



JUNIOR HIGH GROUP STUDY

DEALING WITH PRESSURE AND CHANGE

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General Editor



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How to Use the Uncommon Junior High Group Studies

Each *Uncommon* junior high group study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 2 stand-alone units of 6 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, or to use just one unit, or to present each session separately. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) for each session's student handouts are available online at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/. The hand-outs include the "Reflect" section of each study, formatted for easy printing, in addition to any student worksheets for the session. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each individual session begins with a brief overview of the "big idea" of the lesson, the aims of the session, the primary Bible verse and additional verses that tie in to the topic being discussed. Each of the 12 sessions is geared to be 45 to 90 minutes in length and is comprised of two options that you can choose from, based on the type of group that you have. Option 1 tends to be a more active learning experience, while Option 2 tends to be a more discussion-oriented exercise.

The sections in each session are as follows:

Starter

Young people will stay in your youth group longer if they feel comfortable and make friends. This first section helps students get to know each other better and focus on the theme of the lesson in a fun and engaging way.

Message

The Message section enables students to look up to God by relating the words of Scripture to the session topic.

Dig

Unfortunately, many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students look inward and discover how God's Word connects with their own world.

Apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. The apply section leads students out into their world with specific challenges to apply at school, at home and with their friends.

Reflect

This concluding section of the study allows students to reflect on the material presented in the session. You can print these pages from the PDF found at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_dealing_with_pressure.zip and give them to your students as a handout for them to work on throughout the week.

Want More Options?

An additional option for each section, along with accompanying worksheets, is available in PDF format at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_dealing_with_pressure.zip.

UNIT I

Dealing with Pressure

It is well with my soul.

Odds are good that when you or your students hear that phrase, you think of the familiar hymn. While I have always loved that hymn, I have come to appreciate it even more as I have learned its history.

In the 1860s, Horatio Spafford and his wife, Anna, were faithful Christians as well as prominent members of society in Chicago. Yet neither their faith nor their wealth spared them from catastrophe. In 1871, their only son was killed by scarlet fever at age four. Shortly after, the many of the properties and buildings they owned were damaged in the Great Chicago Fire.

To give his family some much-needed rest, Horatio and Anna decided to head to England for a holiday, so they booked tickets on an ocean liner for them and their four daughters. Shortly before they were to board the ship, some business developments demanded Horatio's attention, and he felt he needed to stay in the United States. Not wanting to ruin their family's vacation, Anna and the girls decided to head for England. Horatio would follow shortly behind.

On November 2, 1873, the ship ferrying Anna and her four daughters crashed into another ship. Twelve minutes later, the ship sank, dragging the four daughters to their death in the deep ocean sea. When Horatio heard the news, he immediately boarded another ship to meet up with his wife in England. As his ship chugged past the place where his daughters' ship had sank, Horatio wrote these words:

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*It is well (it is well),
With my soul (with my soul),
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Odds are good that you and the students in your ministry have not experienced the Job-like trauma that Horatio Spafford did. But you've had your own share of challenges and your own unique pressures.

In the midst of the pressures that middle-school students face, it's easy for them to fall into two polar extremes. The first extreme is *denial*, in which they pretend that they don't have any problems. You might ask a student who you know is going through family drama or has an out-of-control schedule how they're doing, and their response will be, "I'm fine," or "I'm doing great".

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *despair*. In the midst of what middle-schoolers are facing, it's easy for them to feel overwhelmed and absent of hope. Students in your ministry can easily be thrown when they don't get invited to a classmate's birthday party or they don't get the grade they hoped for in English.

That's where Horatio's lyrics come in handy. Note that he avoids *denial* by admitting that his sorrows are as large as giant waves in the ocean (a haunting reference to his four daughters' deaths). But he also avoids *despair*. Even in the midst of one of the worst tragedies imaginable, there is a sense of peace and wholeness in Horatio's soul.

May this curriculum offer our students—and us—a sense that whatever we face, it is indeed well with our souls.

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SESSION I

THE PRESSURE OF SCHOOL

THE BIG IDEA

Prayer can help us deal with any type of stress at school.

SESSION AIMS

In this session, you will guide group members to (1) learn the definition and causes of stress; (2) identify stressful areas in their own lives; and (3) create a plan to deal with the stress in their own lives.

THE BIGGEST VERSES

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

OTHER IMPORTANT VERSES

Genesis 22:1-14; Exodus 1:22–2:4; Ruth 1; 1 Samuel 1:1-17; 2 Kings 22:1–23:3; Job 1:1-22; Psalm 37:7-8; Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 29:11; Daniel 3:1-30; Matthew 6:25; Luke 12:22-31; John 6:1-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Note: Additional options and worksheets in 8¹/₂” x 11” format for this session are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_dealing_with_pressure.zip.

STARTER

Option 1: Stress Level. For this option, you will just need this book! Greet the group members and explain that you will be reading a list of things that might cause a student to have stress at school. Ask the group members to respond to each item by standing and then doing one of the following things:

- If the statement is not stressful to them, they need to put their hands in their pockets (or to their sides) and say, “No stress.”
- If the statement causes them a little bit of stress, they need to wave one hand in the air and say, “Some stress.”
- If the statement causes them a lot of stress, they need to wave both hands in the air and shout, “Major stress!”

Be sure everyone participates as you read the following list:

- Getting ready for school in the morning
- Going to English class
- Going to gym class
- Going to history class
- Talking to someone you like at lunch
- Forgetting your locker combination
- Getting a pop quiz
- Doing word problems in math
- Spilling your drink on your lap at lunch
- Getting all your homework done
- Going to science class
- Being called to the principal’s office
- Being paired with a really popular kid for your science project
- Tripping in the hallway and dropping all your books
- Taking an essay exam
- Finding out you have to write a five-page book report
- Eating mystery meat in the cafeteria
- Tripping at lunch and dropping all your food
- Finding out you’ve had a booger hanging from your nose for the past half an hour
- Giving an oral report

Invite the students to suggest other possible stress triggers. Transition to the next step by explaining that we all go through stress, but having a relationship

with Jesus can help us react differently to it. Our stress level will be lower as we turn stressful situations over to God in prayer.

Option 2: School Stress Melodrama. For this option, you will need one copy of “School Stress Melodrama” (found on the next page) for each of your actors and six chairs. Ahead of time, place the chairs in a traditional classroom setup, angled sideways at the front of the room so the audience can see the group members who will be sitting in them.

Greet the students and let them know that the group will be starting a new series on the pressures that junior-highers face. Choose seven to nine volunteers to perform an impromptu drama. They will need to act out the following roles as you read from the handout:

- Jim, a normal kid dealing with a very stressful day
- Jim’s mind, hovering around Jim and making suggestions
- Jim’s friends (two to four other group members)
- Jenny, a really popular girl
- Mrs. Cranfield, Jim’s math teacher
- Mr. Pritchit, the assistant school principal

Instruct the actors to say the lines on the sheet as you read the melodrama and to act out their parts with enthusiasm.

After the short skit, ask the group members to list the things that they think cause junior-highers stress. (Some answers might include tests, grades, peer acceptance, parental expectations, and so forth.) Explain that today they will be learning how to deal with and overcome the things that stress them out.

MESSAGE

Option 1: Stress Solution. For this option, you will need several Bibles. Begin by dividing the group members into teams of 5 to 10 people. Distribute Bibles and have everyone follow along as you read Job 1:1-3,13-22.¹

After you have finished reading, instruct each team to put together a 30-second skit in which they will act out the story of Job and offer a solution for the stress he faced. Let the teams know that they must incorporate the primary solution for stress found in verse 21: praying and having the attitude that God is in control. Circulate around the room, making sure the teams understand what they are supposed to be doing and helping them stay on track.

School Stress Melodrama



Characters

Jim, a normal kid dealing with a stressful day

Jim's mind, hovering around Jim and making suggestions

Jim's friends (2 to 4 other group members)

Jenny, a really popular girl

Mrs. Cranfield, Jim's math teacher

Mr. Pritchit, the assistant school principal

It's another day at Pesky Middle School. Jim and his friends are teasing each other and joking around as they make their way to their third period math class. Just before sitting down, Jim trips on his own feet and falls flat on the floor. All of his friends point at him and laugh like crazy.

Mrs. Cranfield, the math teacher, gets mad and snaps at Jim. **"Jim, stop that goofing around and sit down right this minute!"**

Jim stands up, straightens out his clothes, and sits down as quickly as he can. Unfortunately, he sits down a bit too quickly, and his chair falls over. Mrs. Cranfield is pretty irritated by now and is convinced that Jim is goofing around. **"Jim, if you don't stop this nonsense, I'm going to call Mr. Pritchit!"**

Jim's mind tries to settle him down. *I've got to pull it together. I'm going to pick up my chair, sit down, stop being such a klutz and try to keep a low profile from here on out.*

Jim sits down. But just as he begins to relax, Jenny, a really popular girl at school, walks up to him and says, **"Um, I think you're in my seat."**

Jim is totally embarrassed and jumps up to get out of Jenny's seat. In his hurry, he bumps right into Jenny and knocks all the books out of her arms. Jenny begins to yell at him. All of Jim's friends start laughing again.

By now Mrs. Cranfield is stomping her foot on the floor. **"That's enough, that's enough, that's enough!"**

Jim locates another seat, Jenny finally stops yelling, Jim's friends stop laughing, and everything finally seems to be settling down. Then Mrs. Cranfield announces, **"I've got a surprise for you today: a pop quiz!"**

Everyone groans. Jim's mind says, *Why didn't I study last night instead of watching that monster marathon on TV?* He groans even louder than the rest of the class.

Mrs. Cranfield passes out the quiz and tells everyone, **"I insist on complete silence during this test. And absolutely no sharing answers!"**

Jim suddenly realizes that he has to use the restroom—right now! He raises his hand. Mrs. Cranfield impatiently asks, **"What now, Jim?"**

Jim says, **"May I be excused to go to the restroom?"** Jim's friends snicker.

Mrs. Cranfield replies, **"Absolutely not! You sit right where you are and finish that quiz. You may leave when you have completed the test."**

Jenny shakes her head and gives Jim a "what planet are you from?" look. Jim nervously squirms in his seat to keep from bursting until he finishes the quiz.

Suddenly, one of Jim's friends whispers to him from across the aisle. **"Hey, Jimbo, what's the answer to number 6?"**

Jim doesn't hear him. He can't seem to focus. His mind is chanting, *Restroom, restroom, gotta go, gotta go.*

Jim's friend says again, a bit louder, **"Jimbo! Hey, Jimbo!"**

Jim's mind is repeating over and over, **Gotta go! Gotta go!**

Jim's friend speaks up again, even a bit louder, **"What's the answer? C'mon, help me out!"**

Jenny is giving Jim that look again.

Jim's mind is screaming, **Restroom! Restroom! Gotta go! Gotta go!**

Jim's friend keeps saying, **"Jimbo, help me out here!"**

Finally, Jim snaps. **"Stop it!" I don't know the answer to number 6!"**

Everyone stops and stares at Jim. Mrs. Cranfield picks up the phone and summons Mr. Pritchit to the classroom.

When Mr. Pritchit arrives, he stands at the front of the room and whispers back and forth with Mrs. Cranfield. Jim's mind says to Jim, **What were you thinking?**

Jim's friends are looking at him like he has lost his mind. Jenny is shaking her hand. Jim tries to disappear by sinking as low as he can into his seat.

Finally, Mr. Pritchit walks over to Jim. He says, **"Let's go, Jim. Looks like you've really done it this time."**

Jim stands up too quickly and bumps into Mr. Pritchit, knocking him into two other students.

Jim's mind says, **Boy, oh boy, you should have stayed in bed this morning!**

Give the teams 10 minutes to prepare their presentations. When they are ready, have them present their skits one at a time. Make sure you (and the rest of the students) give them lots of support and applause for their efforts. Once the skits have been presented, discuss the following questions:

- What do we learn about Job in this story? (*He was a great man who feared God. He was also obedient to God.*)
- What difficult situations caused stress for Job? (*He lost everything—his possessions, his workers and all his children.*)
- Why would losing all of this cause stress? (*Times of pain and loss are extremely stressful!*)
- What was the first thing Job did when he heard this distressing news? (*His first reaction was to worship God.*)
- Did Job try to change the situation right away? (*No.*)
- Did Job grumble or complain? (*No.*)
- Did Job get angry? (*No, again!*)
- Did Job pretend it was no big deal? (*No way! He tore his clothes and shaved his head. These were the ultimate signs of sadness in his culture.*)
- What action did Job take? (*He prayed and worshiped God.*)
- What attitude did Job have? (*He realized God knew what He was doing.*)

Transition to the next step by stating that even if things in our lives are as stressful as what Job was facing, we can rely on God to care for us and be with us. As we read in 1 Peter 5:7, we can “cast all [our] anxiety on him because he cares for [us].”

Option 2: Body Language. For this option, you will need several Bibles.

Begin by explaining that “body language” is the way we communicate our feelings through our facial expressions and/or the way we position our bodies. It communicates a ton of unspoken feelings—often more than words themselves can relate. To illustrate this, strike a few different poses and have the group members guess what you’re communicating. (Try expressing the following emotions: boredom, impatience, anger, fear, joy and superiority.)

Continue by stating that all of us are faced with situations that cause us stress. When these times come, there is really only one type of body language we should adopt. Get down on your knees (yes, literally) and share that during stressful times, we need to go to our knees in worship! God wants us to bring

our problems and stresses to Him. Sometimes He will immediately take those problems away, but sometimes He will allow us to remain in that situation for some time. Regardless, it is important to remember that God has not forgotten us—He is doing something good through the situation. God is always right there with us in the middle of our stress, and He will help us get through it.

Distribute the Bibles and explain that prayer is an awesome thing. We can “go to our knees” in prayer at any time and take our requests to God! Choose a volunteer to read Philippians 4:4-7. State that this passage tells us some important things about how we should handle fear and anxiety:

- We should rejoice in the Lord always (see verse 4).
- We should not be anxious about anything (see verse 6).
- In every situation, we should present our requests to God and give Him thanks (see verse 6).
- When we do, “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus” (see verse 7).

Explain that God is telling us we don’t need to worry because He can handle our problems. He has everything under control, and we can trust Him. This is the attitude we need to have. Ask the group members how a person’s body language while he or she is praying might show that the person is giving God control of his or her stressful situation. (Some answers could be kneeling down or raising his or her hands.)

Transition to the next step by stating that we can trust God even in the midst of incredibly stressful situations. God knows the pressures that we are under, and He is there to give us His peace when we ask. He is always at work in our lives.

DIG

Option 1: Name that Stressor. For this option, you will need a whiteboard, a whiteboard marker, paper and pens or pencils.

Divide the students into groups of three to five people. Distribute the paper and pens or pencils and ask the groups to pick one person who will write down the group’s answers. Have each group list as many things as they can that can cause stress for young people today. Allow them three to five minutes to do this, and when the groups are finished, invite them to share their lists. As they share, write down their ideas on the whiteboard.

When they are finished, ask the group members to discuss how a person might be able to fight against the stress that each situation causes. Explain that our first action should always be to go to God with the problem, for He is the one who can help us. As we do our part and allow God to intervene into the situation, we can effectively fight back against stress.

Option 2: Big Ball of Stress. For this option, you will need just this book. Share the following case study with the group:

Brad is a big ball of stress. He just can't seem to shake it! At night, he stresses about getting his homework done and what he will wear to school the next day. During the day, he worries about getting good grades, being accepted by his teachers and classmates, and not saying anything stupid in class. To top it off, Brad stresses about being short! His youth leader told him to pray about his stress, but that doesn't seem like much of a solution to Brad.

Discuss the following questions with the group:

- What is the main cause of Brad's stress? (*Brad himself! He is insecure and worries about meeting the expectations and standards of others.*)
- Can Brad ever totally be free of stress? (*Not completely. Life is full of things that can stress us out—which is what makes it challenging. The key for Brad is to stop doing things that add to his stress level.*)
- What things could Brad do to get rid of some of his stress? (*He could talk to God about the things that make him worry. He could set aside enough time to get his homework done. He could show respect to his teachers and earn their respect by simply doing his best in their classes.*)

APPLY

Option 1: My Stress Prayer. For this option, you will need copies of "My Stress Prayer" (found on the next page) and pens or pencils.

Begin by dividing the group members into teams of three to five people and distribute "My Stress Prayer" and pens or pencils. Instruct the group members to write down one area of stress in their lives. Have each person share his or her area of stress with the group, and then ask the groups to come up with

MY STRESS PRAYER



What is currently stressing you out at school?

Here are five things the group came up with that I could do to reduce this stress:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

In the space below, write a prayer to God and ask Him to help you handle this pressure-packed situation.

Dear God,

Amen.

five things that the person could do to reduce this stress and pressure in his or her life.

Give the groups 10 minutes to work through the items on the handout. When everyone is finished, close your time together in prayer. Conclude by sharing your own prayer to God about an area of stress in your own life. Extend an invitation for students to share what they have written on their handouts, and then pray for those specific needs.

Option 2: Stress in the Bible. For this option, you will need several Bibles, a whiteboard, a whiteboard marker, paper and pens or pencils.

Ahead of time, write the names of the following Bible characters and the accompanying Scripture references on the whiteboard: Abraham (Genesis 22:1-14), Moses' mom (Exodus 1:22-2:4), Ruth (Ruth 1), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1-17) and Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-23:3).

Divide the students into groups of three to five people. Distribute Bibles, paper and pens or pencils. Point out what you have written on the whiteboard and explain that the Bible provides us with some real-life case studies of stressful challenges and situations. Ask the groups to look up the passages and then write down their answers to these questions:

- What stressful situation(s) did the person face?
- How did that character handle the stress?
- Did that character handle the stress well? Why or why not?

Give the groups a few minutes to work on the verses, and then briefly discuss each group's findings. Close by instructing the group members to share one thing they can do differently when they feel stressed out this week. Ask everyone in the small groups to pray for that person and the situation that he or she is facing.



Youth Leader Tip

Note that what stresses out group members will differ. Some may find running a mile during class stressful, while others will relish the chance to show off—both in gym class and in your youth group!

REFLECT

The following short devotions are for the group members to reflect on and answer during the week. You can make a copy of these pages and distribute to your class or download and print from www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_dealing_with_pressure.zip.

1—DON'T FRET

Flip open your Bible to about the middle and read Psalm 37:7-8. According to this passage, what is the biggest problem with “fretting” (stressing out)?

- It can give you a stomachache and a headache.
- It will keep you awake at night.
- It can lead to evil and keep you from trusting God.
- It can make you hungry and lead you to snack chips and cookies.

Although the first, second and fourth answers might be problems, the biggest problem with stress is that it keeps you from trusting God. As the psalmist warns, fretting “leads only to evil.” It’s ultimately a message that you don’t trust God and believe He’s in control.

Read Proverbs 3:5-6. According to these verses, what is the opposite of stressing out when under pressure?

What do these verses say will happen if you trust God?

When you trust God, He will “make your paths straight.” This means He will lead you and help you with the thing you are worried about! So spend a few minutes talking to God and tell Him your problem. Ask Him for His help. He is listening!

2—WORRYWARTS

To read about a true pressure situation, turn to John 6:1-15.

In this story, we read that a great crowd of people had come to hear Jesus speak. At one point, Jesus decided to test His disciples by asking them where they would buy bread to feed all the people. The crowd was hungry, and there was no way to get food to them. There were no restaurants or drive-thrus—they were out in the middle of nowhere.

How did Philip answer Jesus' question? How did Andrew respond?

How did Jesus ultimately fix the problem?

Think about what is causing you stress today. If Jesus could feed more than 5,000 people with just two fish and five loaves (buns, really) of bread, what do you think He could do for you? Picture in your mind how God could take care of your situation if you would only trust Him.

3—WHEN THE HEAT RISES

Is it getting hot in here? Turn to the story of Daniel's three friends told in Daniel 3:1-30. Which of the following would cause you the most pressure and stress if it happened to you today at school?

- Spilling a drink in your lap that left an embarrassing wet stain.
- Slipping on wet grass and falling into a puddle.
- Having a friend you've known since fourth grade make fun of you for something you did.
- Realizing that you have a major test today in history—and you completely forgot about it.
- Doing something really embarrassing in front the person you have a crush on.

None of those situations would be fun, but you have to agree they wouldn't be as bad as what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were facing. These three men had been commanded to worship a golden image of King Nebuchadnezzar, but they refused to do so because they worshiped only the one true God. These men trusted God completely. They knew the Lord could save them—but even if He didn't, they would still trust Him. That's a pretty good way to get rid of stress.

Is it hard for you to trust God in every situation? Why?

Spend some time praying today about something that is stressing you out. Remember that if God can save three guys from a fire, He can handle whatever you're going through, too.

4—WHAT IF?

What does Jesus say about worry? Read Luke 12:22-31 to find out.

Hali was the biggest "what if" worrier in the whole school. She was always stressed out about something. What if Mr. Reynolds gives us a pop quiz in math? What if the cafeteria runs out of those chicken sandwiches I like at lunch? What if Troy doesn't call me back? What if the school runs out of yearbooks before I can get one? On and on it went.

The problem with asking "what if?" all the time is that it makes you worry about things that are completely out of your control. Soon, you will be completely overwhelmed with pressures. God doesn't want you live that way. He wants you to turn to Him when you have worries and trust in Him for the answer.

What three things does Jesus tell us not to worry about in Luke 12:22?

When you start to worry about something today, do the following. First, think about Jesus as quickly as you can. Next, let go of your worries—give your concerns to Him and tell Him you want Him to take them. Keep thinking about Jesus until all the "what ifs" are gone and you feel God's peace coming over you.